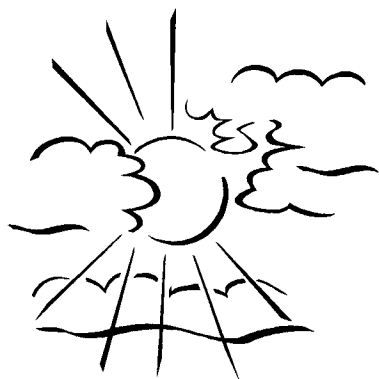


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Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

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Nov 30, 12:48 PM EST

Proposals to revamp welfare program to head to Legislature

By AMY F. BAILEY
Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Able-bodied welfare recipients could not receive cash assistance after four years, according to a proposal laid out Wednesday by state House Republicans that also requires those receiving aid to complete a job training program or get a GED.

About 8,100 people currently on the welfare rolls for more than three years would be given a one-year grace period before possibly losing their aid, said Rep. Jerry Kooiman, a Grand Rapids Republican who helped develop the nine-bill package.

"It's a deadline and we all work better under deadlines," Kooiman said.

Longtime welfare recipients would be assessed to determine whether they should continue to be excused from work or training requirements, Kooiman said. Those considered able to work would quickly receive a wide variety of services to help them move off welfare, he said.

A number of advocacy groups have spoken out against the four-year limit on cash assistance, including the Michigan League for Human Services and the Michigan Catholic Conference. They said unexpected circumstances and the state's cyclical economy could leave former welfare recipients without a job - and a way to receive assistance - in the future.

"A lifetime limit would only further jeopardize the state's most vulnerable population," said Paul Long, vice president for public policy for the Michigan Catholic Conference. The legislation, expected to be taken up Wednesday by the House Family and Children Services Committee, also would allow welfare recipients to work fewer hours - at least 10 a week - for six months to complete their education, finish a job training program or get their GED.

The welfare reform bills are House Bills 4121 and 5438-46; Senate Bills 892-94.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

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Welfare Amendments Move

A Senate committee moved a three-bill package that sets a 48-month lifetime limit as the maximum amount of time an able-bodied worker can remain on the state's Welfare system. The state currently does not have a limit for the length of time people can be in the system.

The committee did pass an amendment to SB 0893, sponsored by Sen. Alan **CROPSEY** (R-DeWitt), that would allow the 48 months to be extended to 60 months if the person is adhering to Welfare requirements and is 65 and older, mentally disturbed or has young kids.

"I don't believe this (Welfare) is an entitlement and I do believe that we need to care for those who are legitimately trying to improve their lives," said Sen. Bill **HARDIMAN** (R-Kentwood). "But we need to do this in a context that indicates this program is temporary."

The idea of a lifetime Welfare limit was part of the House's budget this year and Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** on Monday told WLNS-TV that she doesn't see a 48-month barrier for able-bodied individuals. However, her spokesperson said today the Governor said the 48-month timelimit should not apply to specific circumstances, such as if the recipient is in school or disabled.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has been active in working with the committee to reach some compromise on Welfare reform. The DHS does not support implementing the lifetime limit because it takes longer for some people, even those who really try, to get off of Welfare.

"We believe that if people on assistance comply with all of the rules and laws and still are in need of assistance, it's the responsibility of the state to provide that safety net," said DHS's Ron **HICKS**.

The Catholic Conference made the following statement about the lifetime limit:

"Enacting a lifetime limit for assistance is bad public policy and must not be included in any efforts to reform Welfare. Due to Michigan's cyclical economy, personal disabilities, lasting family situations and other debilitating conditions, an imposed lifetime limit would only further jeopardize the state's most vulnerable population."

Hicks does support other components of the package, including those outlined in SB 0892, sponsored by Hardiman and SB 0894, sponsored by Sen. Irma **CLARK-COLEMAN** (D-Detroit).

SB 0892 and SB 0893 add some benefits that are provided by the Work First program. They also increase training time, allow more flexibility to people in the system who want to work and go to school and require those without a GED to get one.

Social organizations that supported the majority of the bills, with the exception of those outlined in SB 0893, were a little leery of the GED requirement stating that some people who enter the program are vastly below that level of education and should have the option of starting with an even more basic education.

The committee voted unanimously, with the exception of Clark-Coleman, who was excused from the meeting, to move the bills. They should reach the Senate floor this week at the same time the House

bills go to the House Floor, Hardiman said.

The DHS agrees with moving the bills out of committee with hopes that when and if an agreement is reached, the bills will be in a position to receive a vote and eventually go to the Governor's office.

The bills, or some semblance of them, need to get through the Legislature by Dec. 31 because that's when the Welfare regulation sunset expires. The Senate has drafted a backup bill that doesn't address any Welfare reform just in case the reform bills don't get passed.

Lansing State Journal

Letters

November 30, 2005

Poor take hit

If someone you knew decided to take food from the mouths of hungry kids and walk off with the prescription pills of elderly shut-ins, you would be horrified - and rightly so. And if this person then decided to give the loot to his rich, Porsche-driving neighbor living in a 37-room mansion, you would probably be left shaking your fist in outrage.

The U.S. House voted on Nov. 18 to make cuts in the inflationary increases in programs that provide food, health care and education to the poorest people in our country, including slashing \$50 billion from programs like food stamps and Medicaid.

Robin Hood stole from the rich to help the poor, but the House has it backwards: After cutting programs for the poor, they plan next month to continue cutting taxes for the richest people in America.

Shame on you, Congressman Mike Rogers!

Marvin Dunn
East Lansing

Adoptive parents take steps to new beginning Awareness, confronting needs important

Ann Arbor News Editorial

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

Each adoption means a new start for a child.

Last week, eight families in Washtenaw County created such a beginning.

Adults finalized their commitment on Nov. 22, on the occasion of the third annual Michigan Adoption Day at Washtenaw County Circuit Court.

Parents took the big step - the deep decision to bring a child into their home and their hearts. In 39 other Michigan counties that day, about 270 other adoptions took place in the largest event of its kind in the country.

The benefits of adoption are widely recognized but perhaps too easily forgotten by the public. The number of adoptions in the county declined from 262 in 2002 to 160 in 2003 and 107 last year. But for this year, county adoption specialist Monica Ireland-Hicks pointed to a rebound when she forecast 120 adoptions.

To the state Department of Human Services, which tracks the numbers and runs many of the programs, children who are in foster care may have needs that make finding a good adoptive home especially challenging. They may be older children who belong to a racial or ethnic minority, have siblings also needing adoption, or face various impairments.

Awareness is the first step.

The state's Adoption Services Program has been a go-between, helping children whose biological parents have lost their rights because of child abuse or neglect, and assisting families who want to adopt.

Learning a child's profile may be the second step.

The state program notes that children who are permanent state wards often have social or psychological needs. They may be apprehensive about accepting adoptive placement. To ease the difficulties, Human Services officials say they are seeking to develop ways to assist families after an adoption.

Statewide, 2,684 adoptions were finalized in 2004 through DHS and private agencies, about 200 more than in 2003. A relative or foster parent accounted for 93 percent of the adoptions last year.

Everyone agrees that the need is great. The Children's Defense Fund, a child advocacy group, reported in January that more than 7,000 children were awaiting adoption in Michigan.

But the statistics can improve with each parental commitment. One step at a time.

Day-care owner faces sex-assault charges

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

By John Agar
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- At the time, a Grand Rapids mother could not understand why her young daughter suddenly resisted going to day care.

She would cry and "be clingy" when it was time to go to the home of day-care provider Amanda Cross and her husband, Khristopher Cross, the mother said.

Authorities say Khristopher Cross sexually assaulted the woman's daughter and another girl in their care at the home, 2642 Fuller Ave. NE.

"I would never have thought something like that would happen to my child," the mother, a close friend of Amanda Cross, said Tuesday. "I'm not a very trusting person. They were the only people I trusted to watch my child. I'm still in shock."

Cross is charged with two counts of first-degree criminal-sexual conduct involving the woman's 5-year-old. He is charged with two counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct involving a 7-year-old girl, court records showed.

The defendant denied abusing the children, and said: "It's a nightmare and a half."

His wife defended him.

"Nothing happened," she said. "It's a family feud."

His attorney could not be reached.

The state on Tuesday announced it had suspended Amanda Cross' license, and would seek to revoke it. She said she earlier relinquished her license.

The couple held a license to care for up to 12 children in their home since November 2001. The license was renewed in May, records showed.

About a year ago, the older girl told Grand Rapids police that Cross touched her over her clothing.

When Detective Pete Kemme investigated at the Cross residence, he noticed a computer in the basement that the couple said was on "all the time."

Last December, he obtained a search warrant for the computer to look for evidence of child pornography, affidavits showed. The records did not indicate whether police found child pornography, but the husband was also charged with possession of child sexually abusive material.

Cross was ordered last month to stand trial in Kent County Circuit Court. The mother of the younger girl said she is mature for her age, and testified at the hearing.

She said her daughter's reluctance to go to their house concerned her. She talked at length with her daughter before the girl said she had been sexually assaulted, she said.

Her daughter now attends kindergarten.

"I'm worried about my daughter, to keep quiet for so long. She thought she was the bad one."

Father charged in death

By: Ray Kisonas

Story updated November 29, 2005 11:12AM

The father of a nearly 3-month-old baby who died of several injuries after being squeezed was charged with murder Monday.

Keith A. Nowak, 30, of 17104 Tecumseh St., Dundee, kept his head down and held back tears as he stood before First District Judge Terrence Bronson Monday afternoon. His son, Andrew Nowak, died Saturday.

The defendant, shackled and wearing a black and white striped jail uniform, is being held in the county jail in lieu of a \$1 million bond.

Meanwhile, two other young children living in the apartment have been removed and are being kept in foster care.

In a juvenile court hearing following Mr. Nowak's criminal arraignment, Family Court Referee Jack Penwarden temporarily removed a 6-year-old boy and 3-year-old girl from the apartment.

Their mother, Misty Ripple, is not allowed to visit her children, at least for the next week. Mr. Nowak is not the father of the two surviving children and he and Ms. Ripple are not married.

Ms. Ripple is not facing criminal charges in connection with the death of her son, Andrew, who was born Sept. 1. However, Mr. Penwarden said she was home sleeping in the apartment and did not respond to the baby's cries.

"The court is most concerned that a sibling has died and is the subject of a homicide," Mr. Penwarden said in his decision to keep the children in foster care.

The family court hearing offered a glimpse of the conditions in the apartment shared by four adults and three children. Monroe County sheriff's Detective Jeff Corie, who is investigating the case with Detective Dave Davison, called the conditions deplorable.

During the investigation, police contacted the Department of Human Services and asked to have the two surviving children removed. A judge signed an emergency order supporting the request.

"We had to (remove them) because of the injuries to the baby," Deputy Corie said. "For the safety of the kids, they were removed from the home."

Lisa Millyard, a caseworker with Human Services, said in the hearing that the 3-year-old girl has lice so bad they are visible and her head has to be shaved. The 6-year-old boy has visible tooth decay.

Both children were taken to a Toledo hospital emergency room on Monday because of bruises on their bodies.

“I think the children have been neglected,” Ms. Milyard said during the family court hearing. “I have a huge concern of the infestation of the home.”

But Jill LaVoy, Ms. Ripple’s attorney, said the mother has been treating the children’s afflictions and following instructions of officials from the health department.

“Mom has been following the advice and recommendations,” Ms. LaVoy argued. “Just because the child has tooth decay doesn’t mean the child should be removed from the home.”

Mr. Penwarden disagreed. Because of the combination of conditions and events he decided to keep the children in foster care.

Before the family court hearing, Mr. Nowak, still shackled, signed papers to allow cremation of his son’s remains. After signing, Mr. Nowak put his head on the table and sobbed.

On the night of the baby’s death, police said the infant was fussing because he had a cold, just like the other children in the apartment.

Mr. Nowak was in charge of caring for the child while the mother slept, and police said the baby continued to cry and at one point was squeezed so hard the pressure broke ribs on both sides. The infant also suffered a spiral fracture of the femur that medical officials determined was caused by twisting.

“He was frustrated,” Detective Corie said of the father. “He lost control.”

The baby squealed loud enough that one of the adults not the mother awoke and wondered what was happening.

Police said the infant was laid on the couch, where he bled internally. Mr. Nowak checked on the baby later and found him unresponsive.

“He started screaming,” Detective Corie said.

Ms. Ripple then called for help. The baby died in a Toledo hospital later that day.

During the family court hearing Ms. Millyard, the caseworker, said the mother should not have left Mr. Nowak in charge of the baby because he is involved in another abuse and neglect case involving another child in Lenawee County.

“He has a history of child neglect,” Ms. Millyard said during the hearing.

But Ms. LaVoy argued that even though the couple was together for 2½ years, it does not mean

Ms. Ripple could have known about the previous incident.

But Anne McCarthy, assistant Monroe County prosecutor, argued that the combination of events led to neglect and the children should remain in foster care during the court proceedings.

“The neglect is very serious,” Ms. McCarthy said in the hearing. “It’s a pattern of abuse and neglect.”

One of the two fathers of the older children was present but he has not seen his son in four years. The other father was not present and has never seen the girl, officials said. The petition for parental termination case now goes to Monroe County Probate Court. Judge John A. Hohman Jr. will preside and a hearing was set for next week.

In the murder case involving Mr. Nowak, a pretrial date has been set for Dec. 8 and a preliminary examination is scheduled for Dec. 12. The defendant asked for a lawyer in court.

During the discussion for bond, Jack F. Simms Jr., chief assistant prosecutor, asked Judge Bronson to remand the defendant to jail without bond or to make it \$1 million because of the circumstances.

“The injuries in this case are horrifying,” Mr. Simms said.

Drowning ruled cause of death

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

By Ken Kolker
The Grand Rapids Press

GRANDVILLE -- Neighbors and paramedics had just given up after a long fight to save the 4-year-old boy when his mother began talking about where she would bury him.

Kyle Payton, 4, who drowned in an apartment bathtub, would be buried near Detroit, next to his sister, his mother, Julie Payton, told neighbors.

"She was like really calm afterward," said neighbor Patty McCullough, who tried to save the boy's life. "She said, 'God took (my daughter); now he has taken Kyle.'"

Payton, 33, told police she lost a daughter during pregnancy, Grandville Sgt. Dan Steere said.

Police said they were trying to determine the circumstances that led to the boy's drowning around 7 p.m. Monday in a home he shared with his mother at Wimbledon Apartments, 4200

Wimbledon Drive SW, near Canal Avenue and Rivertown Parkway.

The only obvious mark on his body was a red mark on the right side of his head, near his temple, but that could have happened during rescue attempts, Steere said.

Police Chief Vern Snyder said an autopsy Tuesday confirmed drowning as the cause of death.

The chief, however, would not say the investigation is over.

"It's premature to say that is the final word," Snyder said. "We're still working to find out exactly what happened."

The child's death has not been ruled accidental or suspicious, Snyder said.

At the scene, Payton told rescuers she left the boy alone in the bathtub for no more than five minutes while talking on the phone with a friend.

When she checked on Kyle, she found him floating in the bathtub.

His mother carried him into the hallway, where she screamed for help, neighbors said.

McCullough said she and her husband, Thomas, heard the screams and found the naked and wet boy with his mother in the first-floor hallway. The McCulloughs had taken CPR classes for their children.

"She was in the hallway, holding the baby, screaming," McCullough said.

One neighbor was with the mother, but nobody was trying to revive the boy, and nobody had called 911, McCullough said.

"They were just holding him," she said.

The boy had no pulse and wasn't breathing as McCullough and her husband took turns giving the boy chest compressions and breathing into his mouth, she said.

McCullough's husband screamed for somebody to call 911.

The boy took one breath before vomiting, but they never found a pulse, Patty McCullough said.

Police and rescuers arrived within three minutes of the first 911 call, police said. The

McCulloughs continued to help the rescuers.

"She (the mother) kept saying: 'They're going to shock his heart and make him breathe, right?'" McCullough said.

"There was absolutely nothing we could do."

Later, when grief counselors arrived, the boy's mother sent them over to the McCulloughs.

Published November 30, 2005

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Local news briefs

Lansing police probe death of local infant

Lansing police are investigating the death of an infant who lived in an apartment in the 500 block of Avon Street, Lt. Bruce Ferguson said.

An autopsy will be done as early as today. No one is in custody and it's not yet known whether a crime was committed, Ferguson said.

Police officers and firefighter-paramedics went to the apartment between 4:30 p.m. and 5 p.m. Tuesday after a family member called and asked them to check on the infant, Ferguson said. They took the infant to a hospital where the child was pronounced dead. Police would not release any other details.

Abuse case nears end

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS

Closing arguments were set for today in the case of Beryl and Jerome Richards, former state adoptive parents of the year now accused of abusing some of their 13 adopted children. The state is trying to sever parental rights to 12 children, presenting witnesses who said the children routinely were whipped with belts and extension cords. Children also said their parents ignored complaints of alleged sexual assault. They acknowledge using corporal punishment, but said it was appropriate discipline. The jury will decide whether a Kent County Family Court judge should take jurisdiction of the minor children.

Nov 30, 12:15 PM EST

DNA doesn't match suspects in "Oakland County Child Killer" case

By TOM KRISHER
Associated Press Writer

DETROIT (AP) -- For nearly three decades, Sgt. Ray Anger has followed thousands of leads, reviewed file cabinets full of evidence and seen a body exhumed in his quest to find out who killed four suburban Detroit children in the 1970s.

He's seen so many ups and downs that he wasn't too disappointed to find out around Thanksgiving that DNA from four suspects didn't match a strand of hair taken from one of the children's bodies.

"Those were possible suspects," said the detective with the Berkley Department of Public Safety. "There are others out there that we are working."

Anger, who has spent much of his 35-year career investigating the "Oakland County Child Killer" case, said he remains optimistic that it someday will be solved.

Some new leads are promising, said Anger, who in 1977 took the missing persons report from the family of a Berkley girl who was one of the victims.

Michigan State Police Detective Sgt. Garry Gray, who works with Anger and others part-time on the case, said the lack of a DNA match doesn't rule out any of the four suspects.

"It would have been great if it was one of the four people we sent in," he said Wednesday. "All this means is that minuscule piece of DNA we have doesn't match these people."

Two of the suspects whose DNA was examined by the FBI lab in Quantico, Va., are dead, and two others are alive, Gray said.

Now, he said, the State Police Crime Lab in Lansing will go over all the evidence that's been stored since the killings to determine if new technology can find any more leads.

Police announced in February that they would begin reanalyzing evidence and leads in the unsolved murders. Investigators are using more advanced computer databases and forensic techniques than had been available at the time of the crimes.

Eleven-year-old Timothy King, 12-year-old Mark Stebbins, 12-year-old Jill Robinson and 10-year-old Kristine Mihelich were suffocated between February 1976 and March 1977. Their bodies were found after each went missing for periods ranging from three to 19 days. Two had been raped, and one was also shot in the face with a shotgun.

Investigators moved the five file cabinets and 15 boxes containing the case files to the Oak Park state police post from 2nd District Headquarters in Northville so detectives and forensics experts can go back and review evidence.

The child deaths horrified the area, where parents feared to let their children out of their sight. All the children were abducted from suburban business areas.

Through the years, a series of strong leads has developed.

Investigators' last big lead fell apart in November 2000, when DNA from the exhumed body of a suspect failed to match the genetic material in a hair found on one of the children.

Investigators have said the exhumed man, David Norberg of Recluse, Wyo., was not ruled out as a suspect. He had a necklace inscribed with the first name of one of the children, and his wife, who provided his alibis, later recanted.

Earlier this year, investigators collected blood samples from Todd Warzecha, 53, who committed suicide in Texas.

But Gray said Wednesday that the hair from the victim did not match Warzecha's DNA.

Warzecha, a known child molester, was a suspect in the 1972 slayings of two teenage boys in Bay City.

Anger said he still keeps up with the children's families, but avoids calling them unless there's a major development.

"When they get a call from me, they re-live everything," he said.

He knows that as the years pass, it gets harder to prove that someone committed the crime.

"Memories get bad, and people die," he said. "They move, they forget, whatever. So it makes it tough."

"I'll put it this way: We'll keep trying," he said.

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Investigation finds hundreds of unregistered sex offenders

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

By Terry Judd

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

An ongoing Michigan State Police investigation in Muskegon and Ottawa counties has found 249 convicted sex offenders who have not complied with the state's registration law.

Trooper Jay Sweetland of the Michigan State Police Grand Haven Post, said the 249 unregistered offenders have been cited or arrested in the two counties for violations.

The offenders were from a list compiled by the state of 475 suspected violators in Muskegon and Ottawa counties.

Of the 249, Sweetland said three were immigrants who subsequently were deported; 20 had illegally moved out of state, a felony offense; 60 were found to have committed misdemeanor offenses; and 16 were felony offenses requiring warrant requests.

Because of clerical errors with the 475-name target group, Sweetland said 130 were found to be in compliance. The state is continuing to investigate the remaining 96 suspected violators on the target list, Sweetland said.

Sweetland said he expects recent sweep of sex offenders will result in an increase in compliance. "It absolutely was worthwhile," he said. "The word is out that we are going after violators. Come January, the number of violations will be lower."

in Muskegon and Ottawa counties, 1,343 sex offenders are required to register annually or quarterly; Muskegon County has 721 convicted sex offenders while Ottawa County has 622.

In Mason and Oceana counties, the state police Hart Post recently conducted a three-week sweep, resulting in two arrests and one arrest warrant being requested. Mason and Oceana counties have 158 registration sex offenders.

Statewide, there are 37,916 offenders in the Sex Offender Registry, of which, 23,885 are required to verify addresses either yearly or quarterly, depending on the offense.

The Grand Haven and Hart post sweeps were part of a statewide effort to increase compliance with the state's sex offender law. Earlier this month, the director of the Michigan State Police, Col. Tadarial J. Sturdivant, announced that 846 persons had been arrested and 836 additional arrest warrants had been requested at the conclusion of a 55-day effort to increase compliance. It was the first coordinated statewide effort to pick up offenders.

Officers targeted felony-listed offenders who failed to change or verify their addresses during the October verification period running until Oct. 15. Officers also conducted 3,794 random residence checks of registered sex offenders.

The state's Sex Offenders Registration Act requires offenders convicted of a felony listed offense to verify addresses at a local law enforcement agency quarterly during the first 15 days of January, April, July and October. Failure to do so is a 23-day misdemeanor. Offenders convicted of misdemeanor offenses must report to law enforcement agencies to verify addresses on an annual basis, Jan. 1-15. Failure to do so is a 93-day misdemeanor.

Convicted offenders also must report a change of address within 10 days of moving. Failure to do so is a four-year felony.

Of the 846 statewide arrests announced earlier this month, 355 were felonies for failure to change an address, 465 were misdemeanors for failure to verify an address, and 26 were for other misdemeanor sex offender registry violations, including failure to pay the registration fee and failure to sign the registration form. In addition, 101 outstanding warrants not related to the Sex Offender Registry were issued and 64 offenders were charged with additional crimes.

Of the 249, Sweetland said three were immigrants who subsequently were deported; 20 had illegally moved out of state, a felony offense; 60 were found to have committed misdemeanor offenses; and 16 were felony offenses requiring warrant requests.

The heat is on... **... and bills could go up as temperature goes down**

By JENNA KLOECKNER
Ludington Daily News Staff Writer

Jaws will likely be dropping this winter as residents open their monthly heating bills. Thanks to sky-high gas and oil prices nationwide, some homeowners can expect to see their bills increase by up to \$90 a month.

And even though the coldest months are yet to come, the community is already feeling the impact of these high prices. As hundreds of residents struggle to pay their bills, local organizations are dealing with an influx of residents who need assistance and are lacking the resources to assist them.

Meanwhile, alternative heating sources such as space heaters and wood stoves are becoming more common, trimming the heating bill, but increasing the chance of household fires if homeowners don't take proper precautions.

Facts and figures

The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) attributes this year's high gas and oil prices to the recent hurricanes, which disrupted natural gas production and damaged oil production facilities and refineries in the Gulf of Mexico.

Prices for natural gas, which heats three million Michigan homes according to the MPSC, are expected to average \$12.30 per thousand cubic feet of gas (Mcf) this winter compared to \$8.42 last winter. That's up 46 percent statewide.

Scott Simons, a spokesperson for MichCon — a subsidiary of DTE Energy, a Detroit company that provides natural gas to area communities — said natural gas this year for MichCon customers is \$11.38 per thousand cubic feet of gas, compared to last year's rate of \$6.62.

For area residents, who are MichCon customers, that means a 72 percent increase in their heating bill cost this year.

Simons said that although every situation is different, the typical customer — one who uses 125,000 cubic feet of gas per year — will have a monthly heating bill that is roughly \$85 to \$90 more than a monthly heating bill last year.

He said the increased cost of natural gas is reflective of the increase in cost of natural gas in the market and that it's important for customers to know that they are paying the same price for natural gas that DTE is paying.

Those who heat their homes with propane or heating oil aren't safe from high heating bills this winter either. The MPSC reports that the cost per gallon of home heating oil has increased by 38 percent (\$2-\$2.75) since March 2005 and the cost of propane by 7.1 percent (\$1.68-\$1.80).

Dennis P. McCarthy, a sales manager for Blarney Castle Oil and Propane of Bear Lake and Scottville, said the company's price for propane this year is capped at \$1.59 per gallon so customers will not pay more than that amount this winter. Last year the price was capped at \$1.39 a gallon, which means this year's heating bills for propane customers will be slightly higher this year than last.

He said Blarney's price per gallon is lower than the state-wide average of \$1.80 per gallon because the company did its buying prior to the hurricanes.

Who's helping

Faced with these high heating bill costs, hundreds of area residents are heading to local organizations, such as FiveCAP, The Salvation Army and HELP Ministries for assistance.

Robin Matlock, the community support administrative assistant at FiveCAP, said the number of residents seeking assistance with heating costs has nearly doubled since this time last year.

When residents come to FiveCAP and are approved for assistance, she said the first thing the organization does to help them is offer weatherization of their homes, which includes air sealing, caulking, insulation of side walls, attics, and foundations and water heater jackets. Weatherization is free to eligible residents and generally is a one-time service for a given home. Other services are provided on an as-needed basis.

She said for some people, the cost of heating their home for one month is the same as their monthly income. Many residents also are still trying to pay for their heating bills from last year, she said. Heating costs rose in 2004, too. DTE Energy noted a 20 percent increase in the price of natural gas from 2003 to 2004.

Matlock said assisting the additional residents in need is causing the organization to run through its funds quickly. As in past years, FiveCAP is counting on its annual Walk-For-Warmth event in February to raise money. This year, the organization also will receive proceeds from an event called Rock-For-Warmth, which will feature a performance by Fatty Haze from 6-9 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 4 at Johnny's in Custer.

"We need all the help we can get," Matlock said. "The bills are higher and our funds are depleting fast."

Doris Crawford, a caseworker for The Salvation Army, said the number of people seeking assistance from The Salvation Army is on the rise, too. She estimates an increase of about 100 to 150 residents seeking help this year compared to last year. When it has available funding, she said The Salvation Army assists eligible residents with heating and other essential utility costs. To receive assistance from The Salvation Army, residents must seek approval from the Family Independence Agency and then schedule an appointment with a Salvation Army caseworker.

Crawford said right now there is no funding available to help with heating costs. She expects to receive money for that sometime in January or February, and will let the community know when the money arrives.

In the meantime, she said The Salvation Army is raising funds through its Red Kettle campaign (a.k.a. bell-ringing). The Salvation Army has kettles at Shop-N-Save and Wal-Mart in Ludington and Nichols Drug Store in Scottville. Also, some area stores will be encouraging shoppers to donate a dollar to the campaign for a name on paper. The money from the campaign will be used to assist community members with a variety of needs throughout the year, with some being used for heating assistance.

Area residents who are unable to get help from places like FiveCAP and The Salvation Army often turn to HELP Ministries. The number of people going to HELP for assistance is also up this year.

Gene McClellan, executive director of HELP Ministries, said the number of people coming to HELP for assistance is up about 15 percent over last year. He said in 2004 the organization assisted about 800 area residents and this year expects to assist well over 1,000.

He said some people on the waiting list for assistance haven't had heat or electricity for the past two months because it was shut off due to non-payment.

Unfortunately, the organization has been unable to assist residents in need since September due to a lack of funds. To raise money, HELP is having a soup dinner on Jan. 21 at Knights of Columbus Hall.

"People are getting desperate," he said, adding that many are starting to heat their

homes with alternative heating sources, such as their stove or with wood stoves.

Alternative heating sources

It seems he may be right. Local businesses report that sales for alternative heating sources have skyrocketed this year.

Mike Tyndall, a sales manager at Tractor Supply Co., said sales of wood stoves have increased 300 percent since last year and the company sold out of pellet stoves a month ago. He said people started buying the stoves in September. As for electric heaters, he said sales went up slightly, but that hardly anyone is buying propane and natural gas heaters this year.

Sales of outdoor wood furnaces have also gone up. Warren Walborn, president and CEO of Hawken Energy, a company in Shelby that sells and installs outdoor wood furnaces, said his sales this year have gone through the roof.

"We are selling everything we can build and have more than doubled our forecast of what we thought we would sell this year," he said. "And we would have sold more if we had been able to build faster."

Walborn said people are switching to the outdoor wood furnaces, and wood and pellet stoves to save money. For example, he said, a customer who is paying \$3,800 a year for heating can reduce their yearly heating costs to about \$500 by switching to an outdoor wood furnace if they buy the wood for it. He said if they don't buy wood, but rather have their own, that cost would be reduced to \$0 a year.

A new outdoor wood furnace costs roughly \$6-7,000, according to Walborn. He said although that amount is higher than the cost of a yearly heating bill, it is much cheaper in the long run.

He said indoor wood and pellet stoves save money on heating costs, too, and are good for small homes or those who are looking to heat just one room.

Some, however, including the Michigan State Department of Environmental Quality, argue that wood smoke from wood-burning units releases particles like carbon monoxide and other toxic pollutants into the air, which are unhealthy for humans and the environment.

Walborn refutes such concerns. In a letter to the editor to the newspaper USA Today about an article, "Hidden cost in wood burning: Pollution; New popularity of stoves, fireplaces may be making air less healthy," Walborn notes that wood is an environmentally friendly resource that reduces greenhouse gases and produces no increase in carbon dioxide, and that the world is running out of fossil fuels.

Fire safety

Monetary and environmental costs aside, using alternative sources could pose some other dangers, such as household fires.

Research from the National Fire Protection Association reports that even without an energy crunch, heating equipment is a leading cause of home fires during the months of December, January, and February, and trails only cooking equipment as a cause of home fires year-round.

Joe Cooper, chief of the Mason County Rural Fire Authority, said he predicts the number of fires related to alternative heating equipment are going to rise significantly in the coming months. He said there have already been two wood stove-related fires this year, due to people not keeping their chimneys cleaned out.

The NFPA reports there were 45,500 home heating fires reported to U.S. fire departments in 2002, and that those fires caused 220 deaths, 990 injuries and \$449 million in property damage.

Fireplaces and chimneys were involved in 43 percent of all home heating fires and 11 percent of the associated deaths. Most of these were caused by creosote build-up.

Fixed and portable space heaters, including wood stoves, were involved in 25 percent

of the home heating fires, but 74 percent of the associated deaths. Central heating was involved in 19 percent of home heating fires and 10 percent of the associated deaths. The leading cause of space heater fires was having combustibles too close to the heater, except for wood stoves, where the leading cause was creosote build-up, and fixed electric space heaters, where the leading cause was equipment unattended. As for Michigan alone, an article on the Michigan government Web site, "Reduce the Chance of a House Fire, Use Supplemental Heat Sources Safely," reports that last year more than 2,500 residential fires in Michigan were related to the use of supplemental heaters, such as wood- and coal-burning stoves, kerosene heaters, gas space heaters, and electrical heaters.

To prevent fires related to alternative heating sources, Cooper said homeowners need to check their chimney often to make sure it's clean, and clean it if it's not. He said it doesn't take long for a chimney to clog. Also, he said to place fuel units such as portable kerosene heaters in well-ventilated areas, and to place portable heating units a safe distance from combustibles.

For more information on how to avoid fires when using alternative heating sources visit the NFPA Web site, at www.nfpa.org or www.michigan.gov.

Other options

The state and your energy company may be able to help you get through the winter months.

To help low-income residents manage their heating bills, the state offers various programs, such as the State Emergency Relief Fund program and the Home Heating Credit. The Winter Protection Plan is now in effect, too. It protects senior and low-income customers of commission-regulated natural gas and electric companies, rural electric cooperatives and alternative electric suppliers from electric or natural gas service shut-off and high utility payments between now and March 31.

Information about these services and others can be found on www.michigan.gov or obtained at a local Department of Human Services.

MichCon is one of the natural gas companies that offers the Winter Protection Plan. Also, Simons said those who are having a difficult time paying their heating bills are encouraged to contact DTE, sooner rather than later. He said the company is willing to work with customers to create a payment plan. For example, eligible customers can enroll in BudgetWise billing, which allows them to spread gas payments equally over the year so that they are paying the same amount each month.

"We understand that this is going to be a challenging winter for our customers, especially those on a fixed or limited income," Simons said. "We're not just going to shut (someone's heat) off. That won't help anybody."

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843-1122, ext. 307

How to help

- Rock-For-Warmth, featuring performances by rock band Fatty Haze and local musician Jimmy Dodson, 6-9 p.m., Sunday at Johnny's in Custer.
 - Walk-For-Warmth, February
 - Red Kettle campaign (a.k.a. bell-ringing). The Salvation Army has kettles at Shop-N-Save and Wal-Mart in Ludington and Nichols Drug Store in Scottville. Also, some area stores will be encouraging shoppers to donate a dollar to the campaign for a name on paper.
 - soup dinner sponsored by HELP Ministries, Jan. 21 at Knights of Columbus Hall
- In the meantime, there are things you, as a homeowner, can do to conserve energy, and thus, lower the cost of your heating bills.

ENERGY STAR, a government-backed program helping businesses and individuals

protect the environment through superior energy efficiency, suggests the following energy-saving tips:

- seal up your home. For example, air-seal holes, cracks and openings in your home and then add insulation to stop the flow of heat through the walls and ceiling.
- replace your furnace air filter before the heating season begins as a dirty filter reduces air flow which makes your system work harder to deliver air to the registers. Kevin Nash, co-owner of Hankwitz Heating Air Conditioning & Duct Cleaning says to check your filter every month and change on an as-needed basis.
- be sure your ducts are delivering all the warm air they can. If you can see the duct seams where the metal comes together, seal these joints with shiny foil tape with a UL-181 label (This label is very important) or duct mastic (also called duct sealant).
- set back your thermostat when you're asleep or away. When used properly, an Energy Star qualified programmable thermostat with four-temperature and time settings can save you \$100 each year on energy costs.
- call a heating contractor to service your system. Fall is a good time to have a service technician look at your heating system to make sure that it is running properly to keep you warm this winter without adding unnecessary costs. Ask your contractor to check your duct system also.
- use your ceiling fan to not only keep you comfortable but also allow you to adjust your thermostat for more energy savings. Reverse the spin of the fan (most fans have a small switch) and set it on the slowest speed to help send warm air down to the living area. When shopping for a ceiling fan, look for an energy-efficient model.
- open your window shades and drapes to let the sun's natural warmth in during the day. At night, close them to help insulate your windows against heat loss.
- set your hot water temperature at the "normal" setting or no higher than 120 degrees F. This can cut your water heating costs by 10 percent.

For more detailed information on these energy-saving tips and more, visit www.energystar.gov/heating.

November 30, 2005

The Detroit News

Livingston Briefs

Howell

Donations sought for heating bills

The Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency needs donations for their annual Walk for Warmth fund to help local families pay their heating bill. Officials from OLHSA said they have run out of their 2005 donations and many Livingston County families and elderly are struggling to pay their heating bills. The walk will be held in February. Donations can be made to OLHSA, Walk for Warmth, 2300 E Grand River, Suite 107, Howell, MI 48843, or at www.OLHSA.org. For information, call (517) 546-8500.

Food Bank fundraising campaign at crossroads

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

MIKE THOMPSON
THE SAGINAW NEWS

The Food Bank of Eastern Michigan has grown despite the tough economy of recent years, but Hurricane Katrina's aftermath has presented a new challenge.

"Major food companies understandably began to send a majority of their products to the hurricane area, and so that's had a ripple effect," said William E. Kerr, president of the Flint-based center.

As a result, this year's 10th annual holiday campaign -- with a goal of \$500,000, up from last year's \$475,000 -- is a crossroads for an agency that serves 22 counties stretching from St. Clair to Cheboygan.

Kerr and food bank supporters this morning were to announce fundraising efforts, including placement of donation envelopes in Saturday's edition of The Saginaw News.

"This is the lowest I've seen our supplies in my 11 years here," Kerr said. "We have it tougher than other states because we're like an island, we don't have contiguous borders with other states that are on supply routes."

Supporters will repeat their pitch that the food bank obtains at least \$14 worth of food for each \$1 donated.

"Actually, it was closer to \$18 to \$1 in our last audit," Kerr said. "Ninety-eight percent of our funds go directly to our mission."

Example: A donation of \$30,000 to \$35,000 worth of surplus Campbell's soup is available in Camden, N.J., but the food bank may need to spend \$2,000 to transport it here.

The food bank is a 42,000-square-foot warehouse and distribution center with cooler and freezer space, and is linked with America's Second Harvest. United Way funds offer support in Saginaw, Genesee and Lapeer counties.

Last year's holiday campaign produced enough money to obtain 6.65 million pounds of food, more than

40 percent of the food bank's 15.7 million total, officials said.

Donations go to more than 380 sites, including 30 in Saginaw County. Receiving agencies range from the City Rescue Mission of Saginaw and The Salvation Army to Gleaning for Jesus and Chesaning Area Emergency Relief.

Donors may send checks to the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan, 2312 Lapeer, Flint, MI 48503. The telephone number is (810) 239-4441.

Mike Thompson covers poverty issues for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9691.

Food bank sets ambitious goal for holidays

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

By Kristin Longle

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FLINT - The Food Bank of Eastern Michigan is off to a strong start in its 2005 holiday campaign, with \$15,000 more than what it had at this time last year.

In October, the food bank's warehouse was more a third bare, due to supplies being diverted to the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina. But with the current tally at \$63,000, food bank officials say they are on their way to recovery with the help of their annual Face of Hunger campaign.

The food bank is expected to announce its \$500,000 campaign goal at a news conference today.

The ambitious goal will go a long way toward helping the food bank's more than 380 partner agencies, which purchase food items at a very discounted price from the food bank's warehouse to distribute to people in need.

The Flint Journal will distribute envelopes on Friday for mail-in donations.

Kara Ross, director of integrated marketing at the food bank, said there is a much bigger response than last year, possibly due to people identifying more with local need. She said the food bank is receiving donations from people who haven't given in three years.

"With the economy like it is, people are realizing food isn't being donated at the same level and that more people need help," she said.

At today's campaign kick-off, representatives from organizations supporting the food bank will speak about how to boost fundraising this year to accommodate increased need.

QUICK TAKE

By the numbers

The Food Bank of
Eastern Michigan is
expected to

announce its
\$500,000 campaign
goal today.

Current total:

\$63,000, more than
\$15,000 higher than
last year at this
time.

Witness: Man forced girl to play Russian roulette

PUBLISHED: November 30, 2005

By Norb Franz

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

The man accused of killing his girlfriend in a Warren mobile home pointed a loaded handgun at the victim's head the day before and pulled the trigger, a woman testified in court Tuesday.

Crystal Williamson, a prosecution witness in the case against slaying suspect Joseph Henry Duncil, said Duncil waved a .38 caliber pistol and invited others in the home

Advertisement

to play Russian roulette. Duncil's girlfriend, 17-year-old Nicole "Nikki" Hirth, openly doubted whether the revolver was loaded, Williamson said in 37th District Court.

"He showed three bullets, pointed it to her head, clicked the trigger and nothing happened," she said.

The next day, Nov. 12, Williamson was one of three people who heard a gunshot in the bedroom of the home in the Motor City Trailer Park. She testified that a short time before the gunfire, she heard Duncil threatening to "smack" Nikki if the young woman didn't get out of bed to care for the couple's infant son.

Others saw Duncil, 21, carrying a handgun as he left the mobile home following the gunfire.

"Joe said, 'Call an ambulance. I made a mistake,'" said James Green, 39.

Green claimed he had heard someone wrestling in the nearby bedroom but no argument. He said he went to the bedroom after Duncil fled, and held the wounded teenager's hand shortly after she was shot in the right side of her upper chest.

"She told me not to leave her," Green said in testimony before District Judge Jennifer Faunce.

Laura Hirth said her slain daughter's boyfriend previously straddled Nikki's lap inside another mobile home, put a gun to the young mother's head and pulled the trigger. She said Duncil told her daughter: "I'll kill you. I'll take you to Detroit."

Duncil remained at large for three days after the fatal shooting and was the subject of a multistate manhunt. Acting on a tip, Warren police arrested him near a drug house in the area of Six Mile Road and Van Dyke in Detroit. Duncil subsequently was charged with open murder and possession of a firearm.

With no witnesses to the shooting other than his client and the victim, defense attorney Joseph Kosmala argued that testimony and evidence does not point to murder.

"The testimony here doesn't have anything remotely resembling murder," he said.

But Faunce disagreed and ruled Macomb County assistant prosecutor Steven Kaplan successfully showed probable cause that the accused killer should stand trial in Macomb County Circuit Court on both charges.

Duncil did not testify during Tuesday's hearing -- a common defense move at the preliminary exam stage of a felony case. However, Kosmala told reporters outside the courtroom that Duncil will likely take the witness stand to explain that the gunfire was accidental.

Kosmala said Duncil had told Nikki he was going to Detroit and the young woman reached under a pillow and grabbed the pistol, holding the gun by the barrel as she passed it to her boyfriend when the gun discharged.

"She said, 'Joe, I love you. Call 911' and he took off," Kosmala said.

"From the get go, he's told everyone it was an accident."

Kaplan said the trial is expected to include testimony from a neighboring mobile home resident who has told police she heard Nikki yelling to be left alone as someone was hurting her, and that the suspect threatened to kill the teen.

Duncil remains held in the Macomb County Jail without bond.

Published November 30, 2005

Lansing's homeless to get more options City Rescue Mission renovated as need for more shelters grows

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Lansing's City Rescue Mission is expanding to meet the growing needs of the homeless.

The \$450,000 renovation - and the mission's purchase of a former elementary school that will become a shelter for women and children - come as estimates of Lansing's homeless population have dramatically increased.

In the dead of winter, the City Rescue Mission's current 24 beds are full almost every night, said Executive Director Mark Criss.

But the demand is much greater - the mission often takes in as many as 60 men, giving floor mats to those who don't get a bed.

Now an empty space between two brick buildings near Oldsmobile Park, a two-story structure will house a new chapel, recreation area, restrooms and expanded shower facilities.

The renovation will add eight beds to the overnight men's shelter. It also includes installing a central fire alarm system with sprinklers and making all four of the City Rescue Mission's contiguous buildings along Michigan Avenue handicap- accessible.

The mission is funded entirely through individual donations, Criss said.

"It's good news for the community," said Erica Shifflet Gibson of the Greater Lansing Homeless Resolution Network. "We're going to have a shelter that's safer, more accessible and has higher capacity."

Every night, there are about 700 homeless people in the Lansing area, Shifflet Gibson said.

The count is a rough estimate based on the number of people outdoors, in shelters and who come to shelters the next day and say they spent the night homeless.

It is larger than previous estimates, which said the total was 300 to 500 on any given day.

Although single men are the most visible members of the Lansing-area's homeless population, the number of women and children needing temporary housing is increasing, Criss said.

"That's the biggest bottleneck now," he said.

That's why the City Rescue Mission's acquisition of the former Maplewood School building on South Cedar Street is so significant.

The mission bought the building for \$200,000 earlier this month.

"It was a huge answer to our prayers," Criss said.

The four homes the City Rescue Mission now uses to shelter women and children have room for 45 people, but they are turning away many more, Criss said.

He said they get about five phone calls a day from people seeking shelter, but they have to refer them to other agencies, such as Volunteers of America or the Red Cross.

A plan to use the former school to house women and children, which would double the capacity to 90 to 100, is about 1 1/2 years away, he said.

Until then, it will be used as a women and children's day shelter, free store and community outreach center, starting in the spring.

Beds are becoming scarce around town, said local homeless advocate Dave Beatty, who heads Joe & Shirley's Place, a transitional home for newly recovering addicts.

Beatty had to evict a man recently for testing positive for an illicit substance. When he called the Volunteers of America overnight shelter, he was told they were full.

"That's a pretty good indicator there aren't enough beds," Beatty said.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

New Hope shelter gets new hope

- Volunteers of America's day shelter on North Larch Street recently secured funding that will keep it open through the first week of April, said Patrick Patterson, the agency's vice president of Lansing operations.

The VOA received a \$100,000 grant from the city, \$30,000 from the county and about \$10,000 from Citadel Broadcasting, Patterson said.

The New Hope Day Center is the largest of its kind in the region. During the fiscal year that ended in June, it served more than 1,900 individuals. The shelter operates weekdays during business hours to help connect homeless people with services, including health and mental care, child care and housing assistance.

Patterson said the 75-bed overnight emergency shelter for men has been over its capacity, forcing some to sleep on floor mats.

"That's pretty typical in cold weather," he said.

New housing

- The Lansing area has received \$1 million from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority to create permanent supportive housing for the "chronically homeless."

The term chronically homeless generally applies to people who have been homeless for more than a year, or two to four times in the last few years, said Erica Shifflet Gibson of the Greater Lansing Homeless Resolution Network.

The more than 20 agencies that make up the Greater Lansing Homeless Resolution Network will hold a public meeting at 8:30 p.m. Thursday at Advent House Ministries, 743 N. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd to decide on a plan for using the funds.

Detroit Free Press

Editorials

Refuge Rescued

Donations keep homeless center's doors open

November 30, 2005

The resumption of 24-hour service at a homeless walk-in center in Detroit's Cass Corridor was right on time as temperatures drop below freezing. Still, the Neighborhood Service Organization center will go back to part-time hours in April or May. Funding and private donations must pick up for the poorest and most vulnerable to get through this tough economic period.

Budget cuts had forced Detroit's only 24-hour spot for the homeless to close, for the first time in nearly 30 years, on nights and weekends, starting April 1. The federal government did not renew two grants worth a total of \$740,000 a year, and the city had reduced its funding by \$100,000.

To keep its door open during the winter months, NSO secured a one-year grant of about \$250,000 from the Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency. The new money, along with grants from the city and more than \$17,000 in private donations, will assure that the 300 to 1,000 people who use the center daily have a place to go on freezing nights and weekends. For many, the NSO center is the last stop and the first step toward a new life. Most of the clients have drug, alcohol or mental health problems. They come to eat, shower, wash and store their clothes, receive medical care, pick up their mail, talk to counselors and get help finding jobs and services. Employers also recruit temporary workers at the center.

Southeast Michigan's economic slide means more people in need. Detroit alone has at least 15,000 homeless people. Unfortunately, government funding for programs to help them becomes increasingly spotty when it's most needed. That means charitable giving will become even more important for such worthy programs as the walk-in center to keep operating.

A.G. PROBE SUGGESTS ELDERLY AT RISK OF EXPLOITATION

A House panel considered a package of bills on Tuesday that would require criminal background checks on most health care employees working with the elderly, as an official with Attorney General Mike Cox's office said the fastest growing crime against older persons is financial exploitation..

Testimony before the committee included accounts of drug, sex and violent offenders caring for senior citizens. But Wallace Hart, a spokesperson for Mr. Cox said senior citizens in long-term care are vulnerable to identity theft because caregivers are given access to personal information like social security numbers and birth dates.

"You have everything you need to go out and secure credit cards or phone service or to sell that ID on the street, which is happening frequently these days," he said, adding that these employees are not likely to get caught. "Many individuals in nursing homes will never access their credit again, or access their credit report and will never even know that they've been victimized."

Rep. Barb Vander Veen (R- Allendale), chair of the House Senior Health, Security, and Retirement Committee, said the state needs to get ahead of identity thieves to protect the state's most vulnerable citizens.

"We have only just begun to see this problem of identity theft come forward. It's really like the engine on the train, and it's coming down the tracks," she said. "This is a far larger problem than most people realize."

Mr. Hart suggested some revisions to the bills. Among those revisions would be employment ineligibility for drug convictions, theft or fraud crimes. He also urged legislators to include annual criminal rechecks to the legislation

The committee will continue to hear testimony on the bills before voting on the measure. Ms. Vander Veen said she is excited to move the legislation forward.

Macomb County

Caregiver gets jail time in embezzlement case

November 30, 2005

BY STEVE NEAVLING
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A Kosovo native will spend two more months behind bars before likely being deported after pleading no contest to a charge that he conned an 87-year-old Warren woman out of nearly \$200,000 while serving as her caregiver. Pren Karaqi stood silent after entering his plea Tuesday to embezzlement from a vulnerable adult in Macomb County Circuit Court. A no-contest plea is not an admission of guilt, but is treated as such for sentencing purposes.

Karaqi was sentenced to 7 months in the Macomb County Jail, but has already spent 147 days there awaiting trial.

Prosecutors say Karaqi, 52, who is living in the United States illegally, charmed his way into Frances Parker's will and savings account while caring for her at her home for two years.

Parker said Karaqi made her believe he was a religious man who sincerely wanted to help.

"I'm Catholic, and I figured since he was Catholic he wouldn't steal, but he did," she said before sentencing. "I'll never make that mistake again, letting someone in my house that I don't know."

Martin Gojani, Karaqi's cousin, defended Karaqi after sentencing, saying his life revolved around making Parker happy.

"He mowed her lawn, cooked her food, took her to the doctor and did her laundry," said Gojani of Sterling Heights. "He even cut her nails and went to church with her."

Assistant Prosecutor John Latella said Karaqi's generosity was a ploy.

Latella alleges Karaqi persuaded Parker to wire \$85,000 to his brother's Swiss bank account, buy him a \$29,000 SUV and make him her beneficiary.

Latella said he's satisfied with Tuesday's sentence.

"The best part of the plea is, we don't have to put a senior citizen through trial," Latella said. "It's not a pleasant experience for an 87-year-old."

Visiting Circuit Judge Kenneth N. Sanborn also ordered Karaqi to pay \$85,000 in restitution and spend five years on probation in the event that swamped immigration officials don't get around to deporting him right away.

Whether Parker ever sees restitution is another matter, both sides acknowledge.

"I think if he knows how to send the money there, he should know how to get it back," Parker said.

Some health care questions to ask

- The Visiting Nurse Association of Southeast Michigan, the state's largest independent nonprofit home health care and hospice agency, offers help choosing a home health care provider.

The association recommends asking these questions:

- Does Medicare certify the agency the provider works for? Certification means the agency meets a minimum level of federal requirements.
- Is the agency accredited?
- Will the agency send a supervisor to the home periodically?
- How does the agency train employees?
- Will there be a written plan of care?
- Will the nurse or therapist conduct an evaluation of the individual's needs?
- Does the agency provide information on its services, eligibility requirements, fees and funding sources?

For a free copy of the VNA's Consumer's Guide to Home Health Care, call 248-967-8374.

Source: VNA of Southeast Michigan

Contact STEVE NEAVLING at 586-469-4935 or sneavling@freepress.com.

2 more charged with fraud

November 30, 2005

By IAN C. STOREY

Record-Eagle staff writer

TRAVERSE CITY - Two additional suspects are being criminally charged in an alleged scam officials believe cost area investors over \$1 million.

David Nickerson, 44, of Traverse City, is charged with a felony for allegedly aiding and abetting false pretenses over \$20,000 with Gary Singer, the embattled owner of Estate Growth Management in Traverse City.

Singer, 54, and Margaret Zimmerman, 48, Estate Growth's CEO, were charged in July with multiple felony counts of false pretenses and embezzlement against vulnerable adults in an alleged investment scam.

The new charges include Sonya Lee VandeKerkof, 30, of Traverse City, who faces a felony for allegedly aiding Jonathon Brzezinski, a former Estate Growth employee, with defrauding a vulnerable adult out of over \$20,000 in October 2002.

The state attorney general's office filed four felony charges in July against Brzezinski, 25, and 10 counts of embezzlement and false pretenses against the business.

Brzezinski pleaded guilty last month to one felony count of attempting to embezzle over \$20,000 and agreed to pay restitution of \$260,000.

In exchange for Brzezinski's plea, the state will dismiss similar charges after he testifies against Singer and Zimmerman, who are scheduled for trial next year.

Neither VandeKerkof nor Nickerson could be reached for comment.

State officials said the alleged scheme, for which Estate Growth allegedly earned \$350,000 in commissions, involved 14 victims in Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Benzie, Cheboygan, Charlevoix, and Manistee counties.

Both Nickerson and VandeKerkof, who was identified as an associate at Estate Growth, were named in a civil suit filed in July by a local couple for damages in what investigators said was a "Ponzi scheme" conducted through Network Services Depot and Bikini Vending, two California-based companies.

State and federal authorities shuttered both businesses in April 2004 for violating securities laws. In the civil suit, Nickerson was listed as a national marketing director for Network Services, where Singer and Zimmerman allegedly invested clients' money while guaranteeing large returns.

Both Nickerson and VandeKerkof face up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

BILLS TO EXPAND BACKGROUND CHECKS GET PANEL OK

Records of arrests, outstanding warrants and charges would be included in criminal background checks under legislation approved by the Senate Judiciary committee on Tuesday.

Supporters said the main bill – HB 5276 including all public information about criminal history as part of background checks – would give prospective employers more knowledge about who they are hiring for positions such as daycare or hospice workers. Currently, only convictions show up during the checks, even though arrest and warrant histories are public under the Freedom of Information Act.

Sen. Bruce Patterson, (R-Canton) said there needs to be a balance between the public interest and privacy. He also expressed concern that “less sophisticated” people might not be able to differentiate an arrest from a conviction and would base hiring on an arrest, “but an arrest is not the same thing as a conviction.”

The bill’s sponsor, Rep. Gary Nofs, (R-Battle Creek), said he agrees a balance is necessary but his vote goes to protecting the public versus personal privacy.

“It’s public information now but there’s no law to put it into the criminal records check,” Mr. Nofs said.

Despite his concerns, Mr. Patterson and the four other members of the committee voted to send the legislation out of committee.

Also reported were HB 5275 and HB 5277, which amend the LEIN Policy Council Act, adding members to the board and changing the name to the CJIS Policy Act, among other things.

The committee held one bill, HB 5145, which would require the sheriff or the Department of Corrections to deduct funds received by the prisoner to pay costs or fees, in part imposed by HB 5023, which provides fines and fees to cover certain costs of incarcerating a prisoner who plead guilty or no contest. HB 5023 was reported out, while committee Chair Sen. Alan Cropsey, (R-Dewitt) said he hopes to work on HB 5145 to address concerns the Michigan Sheriffs’ Association has about administrative costs and the ability to track funds.

Also reported were:

- HB 4577, referred to as the “Medicaid whistleblower act,” the bill would provide incentives for people to come forward about Medicaid fraud. Proponents said it could save the state up to \$800 million in potential fraud. Opposed to the bill are the Michigan State Medical Society and Carl Alden, representing the Michigan Chiropractic Society. He said the bill could have unintended consequences like

dissuading medical providers to see patients who have Medicaid, rather than risking fraud allegations.

- HB 4798, which would require those who have a delayed or deferred criminal judgment to pay a crime victim's rights assessment. Currently, only those who are convicted are required to pay and often convictions are delayed or never take place, supporters said.
- SB 208 would allow reimbursement to municipalities for certain costs associated with housing an inmate in jail. The amount the city or county can collect is limited to \$60 per day or the actual costs of housing and medical care and officials must examine a prisoner's financial status in an official investigation before collecting.
- SB 541, which would expand the ways in which those who receive structured settlements from a lawsuit can receive their money.

Published November 30, 2005

\$6.6M grant to help kids with mental disabilities Money could fund home, outreach in Ingham Co.

By Tom Lambert
Lansing State Journal

Each morning, Malisa Pearson wonders what struggles the day may hold for her 10-year-old son Austin, who is afflicted with a severe bipolar disorder.

The Lansing parent has admitted her son to a hospital nearly a dozen times since his fifth birthday because of the disorder, which is marked by extreme changes in mood, thought, energy and behavior.

Unfortunately, the single mother's story is similar to many other parents in Ingham County.

But with the help of a \$6.6 million federal grant to help hundreds of Ingham County children suffering from severe mental disabilities, Pearson has hope that her son can more easily overcome those struggles.

"It requires an extremely high level of support to raise these children," Pearson said.

"It's about building a system in our home instead of having to put him in a hospital.

"I want him to have a chance at being successful in life."

The Clinton-Eaton-Ingham Community Mental Health Authority received one of 25 grants awarded nationwide.

The grant is expected to help the agency increase the children that it treats for mental disabilities from 350 a year to 475 by 2011, when the grant expires.

"We are only able to help those most at risk in our county right now," said Robert Sheehan, executive director of the authority, during a community presentation on the grant at the Lansing Center.

"Our goal is to help as many kids in the county as we can in the future."

On any given day in Ingham County, more than 100 children stay in detention centers, hospitals or residential treatment centers, CMHA officials said.

"We expect this grant will allow us to help more children stay in their home and their community," Sheehan said.

The agency will partner with several other groups during the next year to determine the best use for the money, which will be distributed in annual installments.

Some preliminary ideas include hiring more staff at the authority and developing new youth services including a therapeutic group home, intensive day treatment, and 24-hour emergency assessment and crisis outreach, officials said.

"Where do we need to be innovative, and where do we need to improve in helping children?" said Susan Hall, director of Ingham County's Department of Human Services.

"To me, no kid should get thrown away."

Contact Tom Lambert at 377-1063 or tlambert@lsj.com.

Coordinated effort

The Clinton-Eaton-Ingham Community Mental Health Authority will work with the following groups on how it will use a \$6.6 million federal grant over the next six years in Ingham County:

- Association for Children's Mental Health
- Lansing School District
- Ingham Intermediate School District
- Ingham County Department of Human Services
- Ingham County Family Court
- Headstart
- Ingham County Health Department
- Child & Family Services
- Catholic Charities of St. Vincent Home
- Ingham County Human Service Advisory Council

Source: Clinton-Eaton-Ingham Community Mental Health Authority

Detroit

Detroit climbs a little bit on literacy list

November 30, 2005

BY PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

The bad news: Detroiters aren't reading much, according to a study released Tuesday by Central Connecticut State University.

The good news: The city's residents are at least doing a little better than they were last year, when Detroit ranked among the 10 worst cities with populations of 200,000 or more in terms of literacy.

The study, called America's Most Literate Cities, attempts to measure whether communities support reading and whether the people within the community actually read.

"Most of the talk about literacy has to do with school test scores," said Charles Miller, the study's author and president of Central Connecticut State University. "That's just part of the story." Miller used six criteria: education level of the residents; number of libraries; newspaper readership; number of booksellers; number of publishing journals or periodicals, and, new this year, Internet use in terms of reading newspapers, ordering books and having access.

This year, Detroit is up to 56th of 69 big cities with populations of 250,000 or more. Last year, the city was 69th of 79 cities with 200,000 or more.

Seattle was first, and Stockton, Calif., was last.

"I'm encouraged if we moved higher up on the list," said Rachel Burnside, a Detroit mother of three. "We could be higher, but we've got a long way to go. It's not going to happen overnight."

The number of booksellers and the education level of the population are two factors holding Detroit's rank down, Miller said Tuesday.

In 2005, Detroit ranked 60th out of 69 in terms of education, and 66th in booksellers.

The study is encouraging, said John Telford, a Detroit resident and former superintendent of Rochester Public Schools. The former executive director for Detroit Public Schools now works with students at Finney High School.

"That's welcome news, since we've got a 47% illiteracy rate," Telford said. "Any kind of good stat in our town right now fills me with hope."

Miller said there are several actions cities can take to improve their literacy ranking. Investing in public libraries is one, he said. Detroit's public library system began charging nonresident fees in 2004, after library officials calculated state funding had fallen by \$6 million.

Other actions don't have to cost money, Miller said. They include having a sports star or other high-profile figure as the spokesperson for an annual drive to get everyone in a city reading a specific book, or soliciting contributions to buy books for young people who might not otherwise own books.

Finally, Miller suggests people simply turn on the closed-caption option on their televisions.

"They're going to hear the words at the same time they see them, and without even realizing they're studying," Miller said.

Top 5 most literate

1. Seattle
 2. Minneapolis
 3. Washington
 4. Atlanta
 5. San Francisco
 69. Stockton, Calif.
 67. El Paso, Texas
 66. Corpus Christi, Texas
 65. Anaheim, Calif.
 64. Bakersfield, Calif.
- Detroit ranked 56th. For the entire list, www.ccsu.edu/amlc.

Source: America's Most Literate Cities

To see the full study, go to www.ccsu.edu/amlc.

Contact PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI at 586-469-4681 or pwalsh@freepress.com.

Income Importance

Some lessons for Michigan in census rankings

November 30, 2005

At \$46,291, Michigan ranks 17th among the 50 states in median household income, just below Wisconsin and just above Nevada, according to data released Tuesday by the U.S. Census Bureau. The national median was \$43,318. Despite income growth of less than \$2,000 per household, Michigan actually moved up one place from the list of a year ago, when the state's median income fell below \$45,000.

While it's nice to be in the official top 20, the numbers are not cause for celebration, because they are only current through 2003, before the serious economic storm clouds began gathering on the state's horizon. With manufacturing jobs continuing to vanish and the Delphi workers who survive facing the loss of a large chunk of their wages, Michigan's prospects for remaining an upper-tier income state are slim. The ramifications, of course, are profound. The state budget relies on taxable income and on sales taxes, which fluctuate with the amount of money people have to spend.

For anyone fretting over Michigan's future, which ought to be everyone, it is worth noting that the census data do not show income following the U.S. population's shift to the south and west. Connecticut, with a median household income of \$56,409, topped the list released Tuesday, followed by New Jersey, Maryland, Massachusetts and New Hampshire. What do these East Coast states share? The nation's best-educated populations, economies that run on knowledge, and proximity to culture and recreation. The census data will only enhance their obvious appeal to the best and brightest young people, searching for the proverbial hot economy in a cool place to live.

The bottom tier states are the predictable lot. Mississippi had the lowest median income at \$32,397, followed by West Virginia, Arkansas and Louisiana.

Among Michigan's 83 counties, the data show a huge range in income, from an annual median of \$71,387 in fast-growing Livingston and \$63,534 in Oakland -- whence Livingston gets most of its new residents -- to \$27,452 in Lake in the northwest Lower Peninsula, and \$28,193 in Gogebic, in the far western UP. Macomb County ranked eighth at \$51,742, and Wayne County was 26th at \$37,742.

The census data show that as of 2003 at least, Michigan was hanging on. But much has happened since, and there is much more to come. The role models for Michigan's future are obvious -- in both directions.

Ann Arbor News

LETTERS

November 30, 2005

Government, businesses can act to ease poverty

There are many ways that the government and private-sector companies can help reduce the adverse effect of poverty on poor families. There are many families who are poor and find it very difficult to make ends meet. They often have to choose between finding enough money to pay for food and shelter and finding enough money to pay their property taxes, homeowners insurance, water and sewer bill and cable bill.

I offer some good suggestions:

All municipalities should offer a 50 percent reduction to the normal rate for water and sewer bills to families with incomes up to \$25,000 per year.

Comcast Cable should offer a \$10-per-month discount to the normal cable charges to families with incomes up to \$25,000 per year.

All municipalities should offer a \$500 property-tax exemption to families with incomes up to \$25,000 per year. This proposal would work, because there are enough families earning above \$25,000 per year to generate enough property-tax revenue to use for its intended purposes.

The Internal Revenue Service should offer a tax credit on the federal tax return for the dollar amount of the annual premium paid for homeowners insurance to families with incomes up to \$25,000 per year.

The federal government should increase its expenditures for food stamps by 25 percent and index benefits yearly for inflation.

All of my suggestions taken together would take a good-size bite out of poverty and help many poor families live more comfortably.

Timothy Lawrence-Rodriguez,
Ann Arbor

United Way officials assured that campaign will succeed

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

By Kym Reinstadler
MUSKEGON CHRONICLE NEWS SERVICE

The Greater Ottawa County United Way's campaign is running a little slow this year, but organizers say several employer-based drives that typically wrap up by December are continuing, so the campaign still could equal last year's success. Last year's countywide goal was \$2.3 million, and the campaign raised more than \$2.4 million, officials said.

Local officials parted with tradition this year by not announcing a fund-raising goal, resolving instead to simply raise as much as possible. They hoped this approach would help them focus on the right numbers, the number of people helped instead of dollars raised.

"We knew this would be a challenging year," said Sylvia Geisler, president of the Greater Ottawa County United Way. "People may be stretched to their limit with charitable giving with the number of natural disasters that have occurred, on top of high gas prices and increased living expenses.

"However, residents and workers here in Ottawa County continue to step up to the plate for their fellow community members," Geisler said. "It's no secret that Ottawa County is an incredibly generous community. We're feeling very good about the prospects."

The campaign goes into February, but most giving is done before the new year. Money raised will be allocated to local agencies beginning in March, Geisler said.

The depressed state of the local economy, which has included many job losses, seems to be a bigger factor suppressing local giving than "donor fatigue" from giving for natural disaster relief, she said.

Since its Sept. 8 launch, this United Way campaign has been "a roller coaster, with some wonderful increases and some drop-offs," Geisler said.

Dramatic growth has come from Coopersville Public Schools, where employee participation in the campaign jumped from 35 percent last year to 85 percent this year.

"When we talked to staff and faculty, we wanted them to remember that there are still people here at home who need help," said Kevin O'Neill, superintendent of Coopersville Public Schools and a member of the United Way board of directors. "People responded and gave above and beyond. We're lucky right now that we have jobs when a lot of other people don't."

In addition for providing funds for local nonprofit agencies, the United Way last year funded a prescription assistance program for senior citizens, which saved one local couple almost \$4,000 on medication costs.

Ottawa County United Way giving begins slowly

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

By Kym Reinstadler
The Grand Rapids Press

OTTAWA COUNTY -- The Greater Ottawa County United Way's campaign is running a little slow this year, but organizers say several employer-based drives that typically wrap up by December are continuing, so the campaign still could equal last year's success.

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Old Newsboys want your pocket change

Charity's annual sale to help kids begins on Friday

By MOLLY MONTAG
Times Herald

When it comes to the Old Newsboys, never underestimate the power of pocket change.

That's the mantra of Old Newsboys volunteer and board member Ed Weichsler.

The Port Huron resident has been volunteering since 1950 and said he is always amazed by the community's generosity.

"This is just a small-town entity the community takes to its heart," he said.

Donors will have a chance to help once again on Friday and Saturday when the Old Newsboys sell their annual commemorative editions of the *Times Herald* in downtown Port Huron and at businesses throughout the county. Money raised goes toward \$50 vouchers to buy socks, shoes and underwear for local needy children.

Don Laske, *Times Herald* circulation director and Old Newsboys secretary, said donations typically get off to a slow start, but the \$9,824 raised so far this year is 6% less than at the same time last year.

"We feel we're close to plan," Laske said. "Of course, we're very optimistic this weekend's sales activity is going to be a boost for our charity."

Last year, Laske said the group distributed vouchers to nearly 1,600 children.

Weichsler said the organization doesn't deal with frivolous extras. Instead, he said it's about what every child deserves.

"We look at the basic needs of shoes, socks and underwear," Weichsler said. "And kids should be entitled to that."

This year, children will redeem their vouchers for items at Wal-Mart in Fort Gratiot. Vouchers will be redeemed at Kmart in 2006, Meijer in 2007 and at J.C. Penney in 2008.

Nobody disputes the event is about the children, but volunteer Ed Burtch said volunteers and donors get something valuable out of the experience as well.

"It's just a good feeling to know you can do something to help someone do better," he said. "To help someone stay warmer."

Contact Molly Montag at (810) 989-6275 or mmontag@gannett.com

Originally published November 30, 2005

Volunteer helps charity reach Hispanic families

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

By Elizabeth Slowik
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- The people are warm and friendly, even when the thermometer shows it's cold outside, Santa Claus Girls volunteer Rosa Gonzales said.

Gonzales will take phone calls from low-income, Spanish-speaking families needing holiday gifts from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on three dates: Dec. 6, 8 and 15.

Grand Rapids has seen an explosion in the number of Hispanic residents, creating the need for someone who speaks Spanish to tend the phone, Santa Claus Girls President Barb Bowe said.

"The Hispanic Center asked me if I wanted to volunteer for Santa Claus Girls. I was like, 'Yeah, sure, sounds good, I'll do it,'" Gonzales said.

But Gonzales, who moved here less than a year ago from Minneapolis, had never heard of the charity before.

"I went out there, and it's a beautiful place," she said. "Barb and the other girls that work there are so nice."

Gonzales works for Reyers North Valley Chapel funeral home as a liaison to the Hispanic community. When she is not helping Spanish-speaking families maneuver through funeral decisions and paperwork during a time of grief, she volunteers for Hispanic causes.

"Working with the Hispanic community, that's what I love," said Gonzales, 35, the mother of four children whose ages range from 3 months to 15 years.

A native of Mexico, Gonzales grew up in Chicago and spent 11 years in Minneapolis before moving to Grand Rapids.

The state Department of Human Services provides Santa Claus Girls with the names of needy families with children ages six months to 12 years. Other low-income families with children who wish to receive Santa Claus Girls gifts may call 447-9405 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., beginning Monday.

Gift delivery is scheduled for Dec. 17, and 350 volunteer drivers are needed to deliver gifts in Kent County.

Cash donations will be accepted throughout the holiday season. Mail them to Santa Claus Girls, c/o The Grand Rapids Press, 155 Michigan St. NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Names of contributors will appear in The Press, so please double check for correct spellings.

To contribute by credit card, call 222-5796 10 a.m. to 4 p.m weekdays. .

LEST SANTA FORGET

Burch Properties, LLC. -- \$5,000.00

Nathaniel, Benjamin, Jacob Hackbardt and Isaac Hackbardt -- \$20.00

Sparta American Legion, Lekstrum-Burnett Post 107 -- \$50.00

Butch Landman -- \$40.00

The VanKampen Family -- \$50.00

Psi Iota Xi, Eta Sigma Chapter -- \$100.00
In honor of our moms, from Marybeth and Keith -- \$25.00
Lois Word -- \$100.00
Paul and Jane -- \$75.00
E.L. & Betty Cox -- \$200.00
Sylvia Semplonius -- \$50.00
In lieu of gifts for Gerry Wittbrodt and Donna Lutke -- \$150.00
Merry Christmas Family from Mom Homolka -- \$50.00
Merry Christmas Lauren, Tony, Brian, Mari, Sandi & Jeff --
from Grandma Homolka -- \$50.00
In memory of ...
Remembering loved ones from Beverly Homolka -- \$50.00
Jeremy Waranica from Bev Woons -- \$50.00
Frank & Leone Molodynski -- \$30.00
Gus and Doris Abel of Lowell, Jean Sprague of Saranac and Tim --
Sprague of Saranac from the Family of Doug and Terrie Abel --
of Saranac -- \$100.00
Harriet Wagner, Rose Deuby and Jeremy Lee Briel, --
wish you were here, Donna -- \$30.00
My parents Sid and Jennie Sayles, sister Delores and --
brother Dave Sayles. Love Gerre K. Sayles -- \$40.00
My father and mother John & Julia Hazekamp and my brothers
John Jr. and James E. Hazekamp from Barbara A. Pallas -- \$25.00
Brandy Sue Russell from Grandma & Grandpa Hawk -- \$10.00
Betty Kimble from Bert & Myrta Hawk -- \$10.00
My wife Janet , from Jack Zuidema -- \$125.00
My husband Albert Skwarek who passed away in July -- \$50.00

TODAY'S TOTAL -- \$6,480.00
TOTAL TO DATE -- \$25,872.16
AMOUNT ASKED -- \$165,000.00
AMOUNT NEEDED -- \$139,127.84

Arenac County grants help variety of programs

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

By Helen Lounsbury
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

STANDISH - The grants aren't large. But they're sevenfold. Each benefits Arenac County. And they repeat twice yearly.

Welcome to business the Arenac County Fund way. The fledgling community foundation, in its second year, announced its latest grant awards last week.

Winners include local arts, health, recycling, land use and high school and preschool projects.

"When you take it all together, the fund is having an impact on a range of groups and ages," said Roger Merrifield, Bay Area Community Foundation president.

"The biggest thing I've noticed is that for a new fund, its (committee members) are among the most aggressive fund-raisers affiliated with us. There is strong leadership for this."

That leadership is eager to see the Arenac Fund, valued at nearly \$170,000, grow. That way, the invested endowment can turn more of its annual earnings loose in Arenac County, administrators say.

To do it means fund-raising. Administrators' goal for 2005 is to hit \$205,000. To help raise the \$35,000 balance, the foundation will host its third annual fund-raiser/auction on Thursday at Dunleavy's Eatery & Pub in Au Gres.

The event will feature complimentary hors d'oeuvres, 50/50 drawings and silent and live auctions. Items open to bidding include vacation packages, gift baskets, a \$1,000 Savings Bond and gift certificates. All items are donated by area businesses and residents.

Thursday's event also will feature the presentation of grants totaling about \$4,000 to seven county groups. The recipients:

Arenac Opportunities Inc., \$730 for a community recycling program. n Au Gres Christian Charities, \$800 to help feed Arenac County's hungry.

Au Gres-Sims High, \$500 to update the computer lab to Windows XP and produce a DVD yearbook. n Arenac's MSU Extension, \$500 to train local leaders in land use planning.

Head Start Preschool, \$500 to launch a "Little Books" project. n Northeast Michigan Arts Council, \$500 to bring classical ballet performances of "Cinderella" to Standish.

St. Mary's/Standish Hospital, \$500 for a smoking cessation program. "It's our fund-raisers that let us give more out," said Ronda Switek, a fund committee member, of Thursday's event. "We have a lot of fun. Everyone works together for the benefit of others."

- Helen Lounsbury covers regional news for The Times. She can be reached at 1-800-727-7661 or by e-mail at hlounsbury@bc-times.com.

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

The Detroit News

Livingston Briefs

Howell

Deputies help kids shop for holidays

The Livingston County Sheriff's Department will host its third annual "Shop with a Cop" program beginning at 8 a.m. Saturday. Sheriff's deputies, along with all the other law enforcement agencies in the county, are participating. The officers work with the Livingston Department of Human Services and the Big Brothers/Big Sisters agency in the county. The officers will take kids out to local stores and provide them with at least \$100 to spend on holiday gifts. This year the agencies will help 75 kids.

November 29, 2005

Fundraiser benefits House of Hope

FROM RECORD EAGLE STAFF REPORTS

TRAVERSE CITY - Everything from arts and crafts to a three-bedroom house are on the online auction block to benefit House of Hope.

Bidding at www.HouseOfHopeTC.com ends at 9 p.m. Friday. A free public reception will be held at 6 p.m. at the First Congregational Church on Center Road. A bank of computers will be set up for bidding and guests will be able to learn more about the House of Hope's residential program for troubled teens.

The fifth annual fundraiser offers more than 300 donated items, including a house near Bellaire, two sports cars, partial ownership of an airplane, a whirlpool, Florida and Aspen vacations, NASCAR tickets and restaurant certificates.

For more information, call 946-5350.